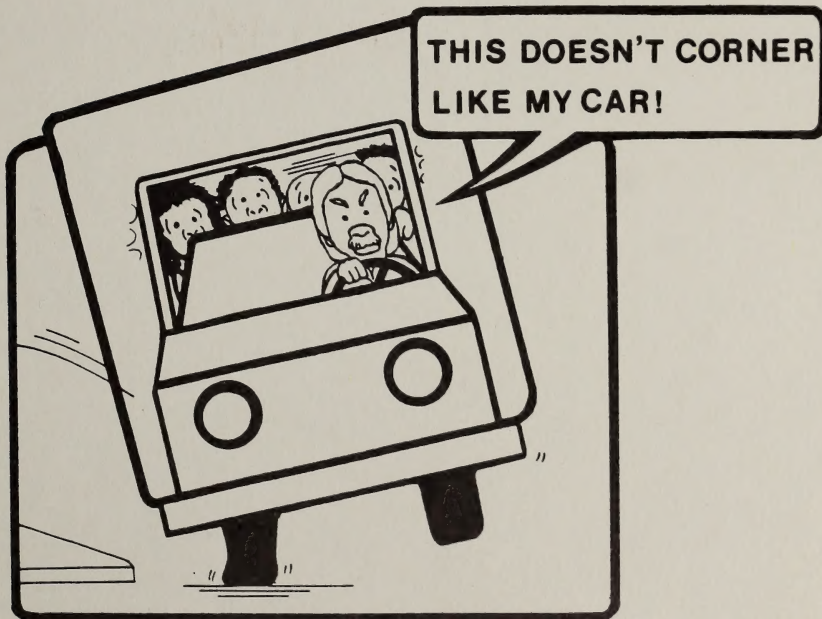


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# TRAINING MANUAL FOR DRIVERS OF THE DISABLED IN Alberta

MODULE 5

## Defensive Driving





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## MODULE 5

### DEFENSIVE DRIVING

#### INTRODUCTION

To be a safe and effective driver, you should receive information on the type of passengers you carry, maintenance procedures for the vehicle, wheel chair handling and loading and unloading techniques. Much of your working day will include these jobs but your main function is to get the passenger safely from point A to point B. This will require the development of special driving skills.

If you drive as though you were driving the family car, you will undoubtedly fail to take into consideration the type of passenger and vehicle for which you are responsible. The trip, even though it takes place without incident, will be uncomfortable for the disabled passenger and could even lead to injuries.

Inconsiderate or careless driving habits will not only lead to the more obvious problems of collisions or traffic charges, but will also lead to poor customer relations and, since the company name is on the vehicle, poor relations with the general public. You will create problems not only for yourself, but all other people who must drive similar vehicles.

The "Three C's" of Courtesy, Consideration and Caution are essential if you expect to balance safety with the driving task.

In this module, we will discuss some of the most common driving errors and some of the most dangerous driving situations in the hope that you will recognize them and adjust your driving habits accordingly. Before reading on, stop and try to list five common causes of collisions.

## **Starting Off and Stopping**

These may seem to be the most simple of any driving manoeuvres but they still result in collisions. Furthermore, one of the most common complaints made by the disabled involves these two activities.

Before you start off, be sure that everyone (including yourself) is belted in. Not only will this prevent injuries in the event of a crash, but it will reduce the amount of movement (and discomfort) felt in accelerating and turning. It can also be dangerous to attempt to buckle up while the vehicle is in motion.

In moving off from a stopped position consider the following:

1. Is it safe? If you are leaving a curb the onus is on you to be sure the way is clear. Signal your intentions, shoulder check, check your mirrors and move away only when you are sure it is safe.

When you are stopped at a red light, do not pull into the intersection just because the light turns green - check to be sure that there are no other vehicles entering that could collide with you. As a rule of thumb count "one thousand and one, one thousand and two" before moving.

If you are stopped in traffic behind another vehicle, don't, start off just because it does. The vehicle ahead may have to stop unexpectedly leaving you with only enough time for an emergency stop or possibly a "rear-ender".

Again, as a rule of thumb, count "one thousand and one, one thousand and two" before following the vehicle in front of you.

2. Is it smooth? Consider your passengers, put yourself in their shoes. Many of them will find sudden jars uncomfortable, even dangerous. Some can suffer whiplash very easily, because their neck muscles are too weak to prevent their heads from jerking backwards or forwards.

Know the vehicle and the roadway. Take extra care when leaving a stopped position to accelerate smoothly and slowly at all times.



Stopping a vehicle requires more than just knowing where to find the brake pedal. In order to stop safely and smoothly every time, you must know how much time and space is required. Be alert to all the variables that exist at any given time such as the road surface, the weather conditions, the traffic in the area, the vehicle you are driving. A safe stop requires the following questions to be answered:

1. Do I have the time and space for a stop? Total stopping distance is the sum of the distance travelled during your reaction time plus the braking distance of the vehicle. The distance you travel between the time you recognize a hazard and actually begin to apply the brakes (reaction time) will vary according to the speed you are going, how alert you are and how physically and mentally able you are. Your braking distance also varies from one vehicle to another and from one trip to the next, depending upon the weight of the load transported and the condition of the road surface. You must be constantly aware of these variables and adjust your driving accordingly, otherwise, you may find yourself in a panic stop situation.
2. Can I stop smoothly? Again, your ability to stop smoothly will vary according to the individual vehicle, the road surface and the weight of the load. A smooth stop will be appreciated by your passengers as well as other road users. Read the road ahead and anticipate the traffic conditions so that you can make every stop a smooth one. If you are approaching a stale green light (one that was green when you first saw it), be prepared for the possibility of a stop. Slow down and stay well back from the vehicle ahead. If you are approaching a sure stop situation, slow down about 1/2 a block away and apply the brakes gently; as you come almost to a stop, release the brake pedal somewhat to prevent that final lurch.

### **Following Distance**

One of the most common collision situations is the "follow too close" variety. Never trust your well being to the stranger ahead of you. Don't assume that he will drive as you would. He may stop suddenly for no apparent reason or apply the brakes to make an unannounced lane change or turn. The best way to counteract this is by following the "4 second rule". Wait until the vehicle ahead passes some stationary object and count "one thousand and one, one thousand and two, etc.". You should not reach the object until you have finished counting to four. The "4 second rule" will be safe at any speed but should be extended to 5 or 6 seconds when you anticipate a longer than usual stopping distance, such as when there is inclement weather or you are carrying a heavy load.

The "4 second rule" has other advantages, as well. It affords you a longer sight distance of the road ahead and allows you to prepare in advance. You will have a better perception of the condition of the road surface so that you will be in the smoothest and safest lane. Pot holes, bumps, etc., will aggravate your disabled passengers and inflict pain upon them. Following the "4 second rule" will afford you the time you need to avoid problems created by the road surface. Turning vehicles are often responsible for bogging down traffic, but staying well behind the vehicle in front of you will often give you the chance you need to make a safe lane change and continue on your way without interference.

### **Lane Changes**

Selecting the proper lane to be in is one of the marks of a good driver. Once in that lane, it is inadvisable to change it without a very good reason. Should you find it necessary to make a change, the law puts the responsibility on you to be sure the move is done safely. Lane changes have three elements to them, and the following questions should be asked:

1. Is it necessary? Changing lanes is a hazard to you, your passengers and others on the road and therefore shouldn't be attempted unless there is a reason. Generally, the best lane for your vehicle to be in is the centre lane (where more than one lane exists) because it is normally smoother than the curb lane used by trucks. However, as you become familiar with your territory, you will get to know the "best" lane. Try to establish a position in that lane and maintain it, unless you have to change because of construction or stopped vehicles, etc.
2. Can it be done safely? As mentioned earlier, if you are changing lanes then it is your responsibility to do it in safety. Signal your intentions well in advance, check your mirrors, do a shoulder check. Know what is behind you. The lane change should be attempted **only** when you know that it is safe. Never assume that the strangers behind you will let you in or have seen you - you may get to know them quicker than you think.



3. Is it smooth? Put yourself in your passenger's place. Lane changes and curves, like stops and starts, must be done smoothly to reduce passenger discomfort. Sudden lateral movements will be particularly uncomfortable to passengers who are sitting facing the inside of the vehicle and, since you face the front, you may be unaware of the amount of force exerted. When approaching a curve, slow down in advance, make the turning motion smoothly and apply power when exiting.

### **Intersections**

The majority of collisions in Alberta occur at or near intersections. There are a number of reasons for this. A major one being that an intersection contains over 20 "conflict points" or points where the paths of two vehicles can meet. You must, therefore, prepare yourself for the prospect of having to avoid a collision with vehicles in front of you, coming toward you and turning, coming from your left or right and even from behind you. Expect the unexpected.

Here are a few hazard clues peculiar to intersections which you should guard against.

1. The stale green light that has been visible for a block or so and may change at any second.
2. The vehicle in the left lane waiting behind the turning vehicle. He may get impatient and, without warning or signal, swing over to the right lane to get around.
3. The vehicle sitting at an intersection when the light is green. Be suspicious he may be waiting for oncoming traffic or pedestrians to clear. An oncoming vehicle may be turning left across your lane or another vehicle could be passing through the intersection.
4. The driver making a turn. He may have signalled, moved out and then, for some reason, suddenly stopped, putting you on the spot.

The Canada Safety Council Defensive Driving Course describes the proper way to negotiate an intersection in four words: Know, Slow, Show and Go.

## KNOW

- expect the unexpected
- know in advance what you want to do at the intersection. Your indecision can confuse other drivers and cause a collision
- know the rules regarding yielding
- know that you can proceed only when your judgement tells you it is safe to do so. Be prepared to yield at all times

## SLOW

- slow down gradually; never speed through intersections
- at 25 km/h you cover 7 metres per second and may use up to 5 metres of valuable space in just moving your foot from the accelerator to the brake

## SHOW

- signal your turn well in advance to let other drivers know your intentions and get in the proper lane

## GO

- get through the intersection without hesitation or over-caution so as not to confuse other motorists

## Turns

Almost every trip you make will require several turns. It is important that you learn the proper way to conduct each of the various types in order to avoid collisions, injury to your passengers or prosecution under the Highway Traffic Act. Since most turns are made at intersections, it increases the dangers there. Some of the steps to follow when making a turn are:

1. Learn the laws regarding turns.
2. Plan your turns in advance. Some major intersections prohibit turns altogether or during certain hours.
3. Enter the appropriate lane well in advance of the turn.



4. Slow down starting about 1/2 block from the turn.
5. Signal your intentions about 1/3 block from the turn.
6. Check the intersection - is it safe to turn?
7. Before starting to turn - shoulder check for bicycles, pedestrians or other vehicles.
8. Proceed with the turn. As with lane changes or curves, be sure to turn smoothly to prevent discomfort or injury to your passengers.

### **Backing Up**

Reversing is hazardous with any vehicle, but is particularly so in a van with rear lifts or ramps. Visibility is restricted, and reversing is often required to properly position the vehicle for pick-ups or drop-offs. Small vehicles or pedestrians can move behind your vehicle out of sight. Caution is the key word whenever you are required to reverse. Collisions while backing are not often serious but are costly, time consuming and annoying for everyone involved. Also, if it is possible to reverse into a stationary vehicle, then imagine how much easier it would be to strike a young child. To reduce the dangers of backing up, the following procedure is recommended:

1. Don't back up unless it is absolutely necessary. Try to plan your route so that you are able to drive in and drive out.
2. Know where you intend to go. Check for debris on the road, curbs, pot holes, snow banks, etc.
3. Be sure the way is clear. Check all blind spots. Where possible, have someone check to the rear before you move.
4. When you leave your vehicle for any reason, make a point of checking the rear before entering the vehicle.
5. Before reversing, give two short warnings with the horn.

6. Reverse slowly. This will give objects that can move a chance to do so. If you do strike a stationary object, the damage will be minimized.

### **Attitude**

A good driving attitude is essential for a professional driver. All the knowledge in the world will be lost if your attitude is not compatible with safe driving. In short, if your attitude is poor, so is your driving. Consider the following:

1. Get plenty of rest and start the day fresh - you will find the events of the day far less aggravating if you are feeling well rested and happy.
2. Do not expect a lot from other drivers. If your expectations are high you will only leave yourself open to disappointment and frustration when dealing with others using the road.
3. Courtesy breeds courtesy (the reverse is also true). Adjust to others; if you allow someone to make a difficult lane change in front of you, you can disarm a potential bomb. Squeezing in to fill up the gap on the other hand can arm that bomb.
4. Treat your passengers with respect. A good relationship with your passengers will remove another potential distraction and leave you free to concentrate on your driving.

Good driving has as much to do with attitude as with knowledge. Be positive, be alert, be professional. A defensive driving course or a professional driver improvement course is recommended in order to improve the safety standards in the industry. Despite all you do, however, there might be times when a collision is unavoidable on your part. In those cases, the module on Emergency and Collision procedures may be of help.



## Review Questions

### Module 5

1. What are the three "C's" of safe driving?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

2. What two things should be considered when moving off from a stopped position.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. Using the "4 second rule" offers several advantages. List three of them.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. Why are intersections so dangerous?

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5. List six considerations that should be made to reduce the dangers of backing up.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

6. Why is a good driving attitude so important?

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This material was prepared by Alberta Transportation for use by drivers who are involved in the transportation of the disabled.

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